

Note on the occurrence of Finsch's Bulbul on Sumatra

by S. (Bas) van Balen

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Finsch's Bulbul *Criniger (Alophoixus) finschii* is a rare, little known forest bulbul restricted to the southern-most tip of Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Borneo and Sumatra (King *et al.* 1975). Its status on the latter island is rather enigmatic, as according to the literature it is only known from a single specimen collected in 1919 in North Sumatra (van Marle & Voous 1988; Holmes 1996).

The recent observation of a number of birds in southern Sumatra, and the existence of a number of entirely overlooked specimens (see postscript) induced me to write this paper on the species. I will give a summary of its general distribution, and a more detailed account of its occurrence on Sumatra. Some information is given on its little-known biology.

Distribution

Thailand

Uncommon resident in the extreme southern province in evergreen forest, from the foothills to 600 m (Lekagul & Round 1991).

Peninsular Malaysia

Rare (King *et al.* 1975), but recorded throughout the peninsula from Yala and Kelantan States south to Johore (Medway & Wells 1976).

Borneo

Sparsely distributed resident in primary forest, with a preference for submontane localities (Smythies 1981). Smythies (1957) reported 35 specimens collected and observations at ten localities throughout Borneo, but there are other records. More recent sight records come from Sungei Benutan in Brunei (Mann 1987); Tawau, Quoin Hill, Kalabakan and Ulu Segama forest reserve in Sabah (Gore 1968, Lambert 1992); Similajau National Park in Sarawak (Duckworth & Kelsch 1988); Danau Sentarum (van Balen 1996) and Gunung Palung National Park in West Kalimantan (Laman *et al.* 1996); Barito Ulu Research Area in Central Kalimantan (Holmes & Burton 1987; Wilkinson *et al.* 1991); Kayan Mentarang National Park, at 350-400 m (van Balen & Nurwatha 1997), along the head waters of the Tubu river at c. 600 m and along the Malinau river at c. 75-125 m (pers. obs. 1997-1998) in East Kalimantan. In all these localities the bulbul was found to be rare, or scarce and local.

Sumatra

The first published report of Finsch's Bulbul on Sumatra was made by A.F.C.A. van Heijst, who collected a specimen at Sungei Tasik (Langkat, North Sumatra) on 22 October 1919 (Robinson & Kloss 1920; Snouckaert van Schauburg 1920). This specimen is the skin mentioned as the sole Sumatran skin (van Marle & Voous 1988; Holmes 1996). It is not widely known that there are twelve more birds collected in North Sumatra between 1919 and 1935 (see postscript by G.F. Mees and Table 1); one was even collected three weeks before the type specimen, and is thus officially the first Sumatran specimen.

The only recent observations on Sumatra are from Jambi province, where during 6-17 January 1996 I visited the Serestra II logging area (2°15'-18'S, 101°51'-53'E) in the Kerinci Seblat National Park buffer zone near Bangko. During a number of occasions Finsch's Bubluls were observed in the edge of forest selectively logged 2.5 - 4 years previously, at 470-650 m a.s.l.

Biological Notes

Habitat

Finsch's Bulbul occurs mostly in primary forest, but is reportedly confined to secondary forest and estates in Sabah (Gore 1968). Along the Malinau river the bulbul was observed to be widespread in small numbers in primary forest and its

TABLE 1

Localities of Finsch's Bulbul *Criniger finschii* specimens collected on Sumatra

(ZMA: Zoological Museum, University of Amsterdam; NUS: zoological reference collection, National University, Singapore; NMNH: National Museum of Natural History, Leiden).

Sex	Date	Locality	Museum/No.
M	4 Oct 1919	Sungei Tasik (Langkat)	ZMA 18179
M	22 Oct 1919	Sungei Tasik (Langkat)	NUS
M	1 Nov 1919	Sungei Tasik (Langkat)	ZMA 18178
F	1 Dec 1919	Sungei Tasik (Langkat)	ZMA 18176
M	8 Jan 1920	Sungei Tasik (Langkat)	ZMA 18174
M	8 Jan 1920	Sungei Tasik (Langkat)	ZMA 18175
M	8 Jan 1920	Sungei Tasik (Langkat)	ZMA 18177
F	8 Jan 1920	Sungei Tasik (Langkat)	ZMA 18180
M	5 Jul 1920	Sungei Tasik (Langkat)	NMNH
M	22 Dec 1934	Timbang/Serdang	NUS
F	4 Mar 1935	Timbang/Serdang	NUS
F	2 Apr 1935	Timbang/Serdang	NUS
M	11 Apr 1935	Timbang/Serdang	NUS

edges, and in forest that was being selectively logged or had been so one or two years previous to the survey. However, there were no records from degraded forest selectively logged three and four years before. In Jambi (Sumatra) the birds were seen in secondary growth bordering selectively logged forest, where they frequented fruiting trees along a logging road. A similar situation was reported for Barito Ulu, where the birds were only seen in a *ladang* (traditional agricultural field) during a period of fruit abundance (Wilkinson *et al.* 1991). The lowest altitude recorded is 75 m (pers. obs.), whereas highest altitude recorded is 760 m (2,500 ft: King *et al.* 1975), but most records are from the middle part of this range.

Breeding

The nest is unknown, but a female with an egg in the oviduct was caught in March (Medway & Wells 1976). A pair gathering nest material was observed in July (Wells 1984). A juvenile was observed in Barito Ulu on 10 August (Wilkinson *et al.* 1991).

Feeding

In Sumatra birds were observed singly or in small groups, foraging on the small red berries of roadside shrubs; other birds were seen sallying after insects from perches in low shrubs, but also tall trees, in a flycatcher-like manner.

Voice

Calls were tape-recorded by the author in East Kalimantan (Kayang Mentarang NP, 4 February 1992; Malinau, 11 September 1998), and in Jambi, Sumatra (Sungai Sengak, at 470 m, 8 January 1996, 1335 h). The following descriptions were made of the calls: 1. subdued "twut"; also heard in flight. 2. loud, nasal to wheezy, explosive "hwuiikt", rising at the end; heard when at rest. Recordings of both call types are deposited with the National Sound Archive (London) [NSA 62125, 62126, 62127]. Nothing resembling a more complex type of song was heard.

Discussion

Finsch's Bulbul has been infrequently recorded. This paucity of records can be partly attributed to its being restricted to a relatively narrow belt between 75 m and 760 m. More importantly the bulbuls may be overlooked because of their inconspicuous behaviour, normally in the middle storey of dense forest, and only coming to more open areas when fruits are abundant in places such as forest clearings and roadsides. The records from Jambi constitute a major southern extension of its formerly known range in North Sumatra province.

Its apparent scarcity within its restricted altitudinal and geographic range makes this species vulnerable (N. Collar pers. comm. 1999), especially with respect to the alarming rate of forest destruction in this range. Although there exists some tolerance to habitat disturbance, its local disappearance from degraded forest gives reason for concern.

Acknowledgements

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Postscript by Gerlof F. Mees

My interest in *Criniger finschii* dates from the mid-1960s, when in the Leiden collection I found, unidentified, a specimen from Sumatra, collected by Jonkheer F.C. van Heurn (1888-1974). Aware that there was only one previous Sumatran record, I contacted Jhr van Heurn to advise him of the presence of this interesting specimen and, intrigued

by the similarity in date and locality to van Heijst's specimen, I asked for particulars. Jhr van Heurn informed me that, indeed, the specimen was obtained during a visit of a few days to van Heijst, who was at that time engaged in clearing primary forest to make place for rubber plantations. During his stay, van Heurn shot a small number of birds, among which was the Leiden specimen of *C. finschii*. As this suggested that at that time the species was rather common, I contacted several other museums who might have material, and in that way built up the list of 13 specimens printed above, all of which I have examined. The Singapore specimens from Timbang-Serdang were without a collector's name, but it has now become clear that it must have been H. Bogaarts (cf. Van Marle & Voous 1988: 47, 115). Most surprising was the series of seven specimens in Amsterdam.

I wrote a note about the species, including the table here reproduced, and offered it for publication to "Limosa", as a courtesy to Jhr van Heurn, who was a former editor of "Limosa" and has always particularly encouraged publications on Indonesian birds. Unfortunately, the later editor returned my note: interest in Indonesian birds was at its nadir then, and a simple note on a bird that, after all, had already been recorded from Sumatra, was evidently regarded as too insignificant to justify publication. Thus, my note languished for over 30 years, so that the mistaken notion that the species was known from Sumatra from a single specimen, was perpetuated.

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**On types of trochilids in the Natural History
Museum, Tring III. *Amazilia alfaroana*
Underwood (1896), with notes on biogeography
and geographical variation in the *Saucerottia*
saucerrottei superspecies**

by *A.-A. Weller*

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Based on biogeographical and morphological evidence, Weller (1999) suggested that the Neotropical hummingbird taxon *Saucerottia* (Bonaparte, 1850) should be separated from the genus *Amazilia* (Lesson, 1843). This classification had been already proposed by others (e.g. Hartert 1900, Simon 1921, Nicéforo Maria 1940) prior to Peters' (1945) check-list of the family Trochilidae. Berlioz (1933) suggested that *Saucerottia*, among other species, should comprise *S. cyanifrons*, *S. saucerrottei*, and *S. viridigaster*.